

MONDALE CHARGES REAGAN IS EVADING BLAME IN BOMBING

Carter and Former Leaders of C.I.A. Assail President as Wrong on Intelligence

By HEDRICK SMITH

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 27 — Walter F. Mondale accused President Reagan today of an "inexcusable" attempt to shift the blame for last week's bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut. Earlier, the White House sought to soften Mr. Reagan's implication that the fault lay with the "near destruction of our intelligence capability" before his Administration took office.

At a news conference after his meeting in New York City with Andrei A. Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Mondale asserted that Mr. Reagan should quit trying to pass on the blame for the incident.

"The latest statement by the President is inexcusable," Mr. Mondale said. "He should stand up and say he is responsible. By saying the C.I.A. is weak, he encourages terrorists and our enemies around the world to believe that we don't have an effective intelligence capacity, when we do."

It was one of Mr. Mondale's most blistering criticisms of the President.

Reagan Charges Distortion

In Washington, Mr. Reagan complained to reporters about "the way you distorted my remarks about the C.I.A."

The White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, said the President was referring to "reports in the media putting the blame entirely on the Carter Administration." Several reporters said they had based their articles Wednesday on guidance from Reagan White House officials.

But today Mr. Speakes said the President had been talking about "a decade-long trend and a climate in Congress" in which "human intelligence had been weakened considerably."

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He added that the President had not meant that this trend had led specifically to the bombing, although Mr. Reagan's comments had come in answer to a specific question about that incident. Two Americans and an unknown number of Lebanese died.

More broadly, several former senior intelligence officials said the cutback in overseas intelligence agents began in 1967, long before the Carter Administration. It was carried out, they said,

under Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter, and by 1978, the Carter White House had reversed the trend and was pushing for increases in intelligence funds.

Moreover, several officials said, there had been no intelligence failure before the Beirut bombing because warnings from terrorist groups about such an attack had been made public.

Former President Jimmy Carter, saying he had previously restrained himself in the face of "a stream of false assertions" by President Reagan, issued an unusually strong statement. It charged that Mr. Reagan's "claim yesterday that his predecessors are responsible for the repeated terrorist bombings of Americans is personally insulting and too gross in its implications to ignore."

"He only has to question his own Administration officials to determine that his statement was also completely false," Mr. Carter added. "This series of tragedies in the Middle East has been brought about by the President's own deeply flawed policy and inadequate security precautions in the face of proven danger."

"His frivolous reference to tardy kitchen repairs is indicative of his refusal to face the reality of his own responsibility," Mr. Carter went on, alluding to Mr. Reagan's likening of constructing security barriers to getting a kitchen remodeled on schedule. "Mr. Reagan should apologize for these misleading statements," Mr. Carter asserted.

Mondale Sees a Divisive Move

Mr. Mondale said it was wrong for Mr. Reagan to suggest any division between the two major political parties on the need for a strong Central Intelligence Agency and to imply that he had inherited a weakened intelligence network.

Mr. Reagan's comment came in response to a student's question about the Beirut bombing at a campaign stop at Bowling Green State University in Ohio Wednesday. As he had said previously, Mr. Reagan observed that no security "can make you 100 percent safe" and "an embassy is not a bunker."

Then he told "the real problem is the feeling the effort to destroy of our in recent years the effort that spying is some get rid of our we did that to

Seeking to

"Your biggest we're trying, to where you advance what they prepared for it."

Campaigning in Saginaw, Mich., Vice President Bush, who was a Director of Central Intelligence in 1976, said today that it would be wrong to interpret Mr. Reagan's comments as laying the blame for the Beirut bombing on the Carter Administration.

"But I do believe there were cuts made in the intelligence business that were inappropriate," Mr. Bush went on. "Laying off a lot of people and thus curtailing a lot of our sources on intelligence was not good for the overall intelligence community, and I think that's what the President's trying to say."

Former intelligence directors as well as Democratic politicians took issue with Mr. Bush's implication that this began with the Carter Administration. William E. Colby, who served in a Republican Administration as Director of Central Intelligence from September 1974 to January 1976, also called Mr. Reagan "mistaken on two counts."

"The first is that we began to reduce the size of the agency in 1967," Mr. Colby said. There was a gradual decline in numbers because there was a decline in covert action, in operations that try to influence other countries and a shift to intelligence collection and analysis, he said.

"The second is that the problem in Beirut was not a failure of intelligence but a problem of putting in proper security," Mr. Colby added. Mr. Speakes said that was the burden of a report given the President today by Robert Oakley, the State Department's top specialist on terrorism.

Other senior former intelligence officials said Richard Helms and James R. Schlesinger, the Directors of Central Intelligence under Presidents Johnson and Nixon, had eliminated 1,000 to 1,500 overseas agents under a deliberate plan to scale down the agency as American involvement in Vietnam and Southeast Asia was phased out.

Senate investigations of the agency in the mid-1970's led to disclosures of assassination plots, drug experimentation with unwitting human subjects, surveillance of Americans and a string of other abuses that hastened the agency's shift away from agents to increasingly sophisticated satellite, electronic and photographic intelligence-gathering.

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